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MATWATCH

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STEVE'S SIDELIGHTS
By Steve Beverly

A HORSEMAN IS A HORSE, OF COURSE, OF COURSE

(EDITOR'S NOTE: We'll get around to our column on Gordon Solie as soon as this story FINALLY ends---will it ever? This week, we attempt to organize a bit of a chronology of the last week in the life of the NWA---a week which may turn out to be its ultimate turning point.)

FRIDAY, SEPT. 9

Early in the day, Jim Crockett is visited by one of many he hears from these days: a creditor. This specific creditor, who MATWATCH talked with earlier in the week, is owed an estimated $40,000. Crockett tells him he is trying to settle his debts at 40 cents on the dollar. The creditor is not amused. A suit could be his next step.

The gates do not look good for the second round of Flair-Luger rematches. Where initial crowds were regularly in the five figures, the current series is only drawing in the 3,000-6,000 range. All-Pro NFL veteran John Ayers isn't going to be the answer as special referee.

At some point during the day, Crockett learns that Tully Blanchard and Arn Anderson are finally making good on a threat the NWA world tag champions had made for months: they're signing with the WWF. Sources close to the situation insist no panic came over JCP quarters but others suggest Crockett expedites a return to the negotiating table with Turner Broadcasting.

SATURDAY, SEPT. 10

Tully & Arn miss the TBS telecast but the show had been taped days earlier. The Midnight Express-T&A angle is still pushed on TV. Sources have told MATWATCH that at this point, the TBS people have still not been told of the defection of half of the Four Horsemen. MATWATCH has learned that in recommendations made to TBS executives studying the purchase of JCP, one strong one was to retain the Horsemen at all costs. That evening in Philadelphia---in a move not planned in the series because in Dusty's NWA, no one has held two belts since Ron Bass' Mid-Atlantic singles and tag titles in 1984, T&A drop the world belts to the Midnights.

SUNDAY, SEPT. 11

No decision is apparently settled in the JCP organization on how to explain the loss of Tully & Arn to the fans. The few insiders who know of the defection don't suggest the move is fatal to the NWA but believe Crockett cannot repeat the Powers of Pain coward burial or the ridiculous Ronnie Garvin "beating in a hotel" excuse. One wag half-seriously suggests Al Perez and Larry Zbyszko may be elevated to Horsemen status---but most knowledgeable observers feel JCP has to kill the Horsemen angle and move swiftly toward a heavyweight title change as well. A Flair babyface turn could gradually ensue in Ric becoming angry over J.J. Dillon's bad management in letting T&A and Lex Luger fly the coop in the last year, so one suggests. The theories are endless but most of the wrestling industry is still unaware of the T&A switch.

MONDAY, SEPT. 12

The TBS team is flying to Dallas tomorrow with hopes of finally closing the deal. Ric Flair, according to MATWATCH sources, who is an integral part of the TBS purchase, informs JCP he has an ear infection and cannot attend the Dallas meeting and will likely miss the week's syndicated TV taping. Speculation develops that the ear infection is cryptic, at best.

Meanwhile, MATWATCH is told by three sources that a deal is being struck between Crockett and

Fritz Von Erich. The details are sketchy but insiders suggest the likely scenario would parallel Crockett's Florida deal of early 1987. In this case: (1) no money would be exchanged between JCP and World Class; (2) Crockett would assume the television network, particularly the prized Dallas Saturday night slot; (3) The Von Erichs and probably the Samoan Swat Team would be the major World Class names retained by the NWA; and (4) JCP would promote shows in Texas in which Von Erich would receive a percentage of the gates. At press time, this still had no final confirmation.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 13

The TBS people arrive in Dallas and are told of the loss of Tully & Arn, which MATWATCH has been informed did not set well with the Atlanta contingent. At midday, we're told by one of our most trusted sources that Flair, long-rumored to be on the verge of jumping to Titan Sports, indeed may do so before the week ends. Apparently, this prospect is also discussed in Dallas. The national cable ratings for CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS III are discussed (a 5.4 rating and 10 share, just a shade below the average for CLASH I) and a source close to the situation has told MATWATCH Crockett and Dusty suggested to Petrik that a 5.4 rating without Ric Flair wrestling on the CLASH card means they'll be able to do okay without him. (ED.: If so, they forget Flair's presence during the 2 1/2 hours created a mystique that he may get involved, which probably aided tune-ins.)

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 14

Petrik and the TBS crew return to Atlanta and Crockett is with them. A TBS source tells MATWATCH things look "real good" for a sale by Sept. 30. But we're told pessimism reigns concerning the chances of retaining Flair. (MATWATCH has been told by an alternate source that without Flair there will be no TBS deal but that is not the same story coming out of Atlanta.) Another insider suggests Ted Turner may put as many NWA wrestlers as he is interested in under personal services contracts to wrestle strictly for television and allow them to remain free agents for arena shows. The financial incentives, we're told, would probably be excellent for the wrestlers.

A sidelight story develops: if in fact Crockett does have a deal to take over the World Class TV network, this could bring about a spinoff effect to another consortium, the All-Pro Wrestling Network, of which World Class is a major player---along with Memphis, FLAIR (the ladies' group), AWA and PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK. World Class' 100-plus station lineup attracts the lion's share of national advertising for the five-show group. A worst-case scenario would break up the All-Pro cartel and possibly spell cancellation for PWTW and FLAIR in syndication. However, MATWATCH has been told World Class' syndication rights are held by an entity other than the Von Erichs and could stand in the way of Crockett inheriting dozens of new stations.

THURSDAY, SEPT. 15

Nothing really new on the Ric Flair front. But we learn of another Crockett crisis: Sting has apparently signed for a tour with Shohei Baba's All Japan in mid-October right at the heart of the Starrcade buildup. With much of the industry pointing to Sting rather than Lex Luger as a necessary focal point of a Ted Turner promotion in the event of a Flair departure, this is not good news. Plus, on the CWF show which airs tonight in the Columbus market, Tim Horner suggests Brad Armstrong is on his way out of the NWA, which could cost the group one of its finest young workers. All of this just two days away from Crockett losing key TV slots in Pittsburgh and San Francisco and on his long-time VHF stronghold of WTVM in Columbus, Ga.

FRIDAY, SEPT. 16

An inside source close to the Crockett/Von Erich situation says that while it isn't finalized, "it's 95% certain of happening." I wish people wouldn't use these percentages any more. I'm later told the NWA may even be supplying wrestlers to the World Class Cotton Bowl show Oct. 15.

But a major call comes through just before midnight: MATWATCH is told the NWA/Turner situation is apparently a "done deal," with the following stipulations: (1) David & Frances Crockett are offered employment in the company (I can't believe this is long-term or of major reponsibility); (2) Crockett must settle his major debt with Bill Watts before papers are signed; (3) Ric Flair is to be offered a firm one-year, six-figure contract (no balloon payments) on Oct. 1; and (4) Jim Crockett has a multiyear contract in an unspecified capacity. My reaction? I'll believe the deal's officially done when the ink is dry but I hope it finally is. I can't believe TBS will let the Crocketts retain power any longer than they can hire their own people to run the show. We'll be watching!

COMINGS & GOINGS

---Bad news in the CWF: Eddie Gilbert hospitalized with apparent bone chips aggravated by a 1981 auto accident which critically injured Eddie. He's in a neck brace, doctors advise him to stay out six weeks and come back for re-examination. We'll miss him.

---No official word on how Gilbert, #3 seed at ROAD TO BIRMINGHAM Oct. 3, will be replaced at RTB. We've been told a big TV angle will be shot which will somewhat explain Gilbert's absence and place the promotion's focus heavily on the shoulders of Paul E. Dangerously.

---Dangerously's going to have to work super hard to keep a group of heels over, none of whom are blockbuster villains. If he succeeds, he'll probably be a co-favorite for Manager of the Year.

---Who's laughing in Atlanta now? Joe Pedicino's SUPERSTARS OF WRESTLING drew a 4 rating its first week out for WVEU Ch. 69, the highest rated 7-hour block in the station's history. New ad accounts are already being lured to WVEU and in the key 11-midnight slot, CWF Wrestling beat the WWF (the last remaining wrestling vestige on Joe's old WATL) head-to-head.

---Week 2, Joe dropped to a 2.5 average, but finished in a virtual tie among the market's independents on a Saturday night against the onslaught of two big college football games on CBS and ABC and Miss America on NBC.

---When PWTW expands back to an hour Oct. 1, stations may run either the full hour or a half-hour version.

---Jack Victory is going to use a loaded mask as Russian Assassin II. By the way, during the break after the chain match on CLASH III, Nikita saved Uncle Ivan. Great timing, huh?

---Ronnie Garvin is expected to make an upcoming TV taping for the CWF. At his Chattanooga appearance with Tim Horner, fans were congratulating him "for what you did to Dusty Rhodes."

---Let me mention Ron Lemieux's new ARENA REPORT, a thorough results sheet. It's 50 cents per issue and Ron promises two per month. Order from Ron Lemieux, 205 Vernon Ave., #187 Vernon Ct., Vernon CT 06066.

---You'll think Verne Gagne is taking Dulcolax when you hear some of the matches for his proposed Dec. 13 pay-per-view card: Ronnie Garvin vs. Roberto Duran ("Battle of the Hands of Stone")? No way: Duran just signed for a Dec. 1 fight. A ladies' "lingerie tag match?" A Fatback Battle Royal with only 300-plus pounders (with ex-Dallas Cowboy Harvey Martin)? I think I'd as soon see Sputnik Monroe vs. Dick Dunn. If this show is successful, I'll eat liver for supper.

---New in Vinceland: One Man Gang is now billed from Africa as Kareem. Eventually, he'll probably be known as Whitestud Williams and later find out he's Ray Candy. Also, Cheryl Roberts is now valet for Jake, and Terry Taylor is now in the Heenan Family and being called Little Red Rooster. Do I detect a feud with a certain Blue Blazer?

---I nearly roll every time I hear Alfred Hayes doing the "TUM-TA-TUM-TUM-TUMMMS!" voiceover on the WWF promotional considerations.

---Several of you have written about chairs becoming almost a routine part of TV matches and most of you dislike it intensely. So do I. It used to be that a chair was saved for a no DQ match or one with special stips but you see it about a half-dozen times a show now. It no longer has any impact.

---Let me pass along an office number for you to call me. It's (205) 826-4115 between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. (EDT). The number on my logo is where I can be reached nights and weekends. If my wife has answered at home and sounds confused: she's a brilliant lady but she's not wired into this stuff as her wacko husband.

---I'm told many of the NWA wrestlers are angry at Blanchard for the loss of the T&A team. Tully was not very popular with his peers while Arn is regarded as a first-class pro. Some even say privately, Arn probably wouldn't have left without Tully's badgering.

---Supposedly, Arn offered to finish the series with the Midnights and do the job with another partner. Dusty said no. Early word is T&A may be pushed as singles in the WWF.

---The other early line is that two new Horsemen will be imported and the Midnights will be kept primarily as faces but as an all-purpose team which will take on everybody.

TV TEMPO (Weekend of Sept. 16-18)

RATINGS: PINFALL! - Must See. PILEDRIVER - Excellent. POWERSLAM - Good. DRAW - Average. RESTHOLD - Fair. BOMB - Poor. PLUS - Midscale rating.

(CWF) - Johnny & Davey Rich d. Lee Peek/Ted Manson; Rick Hazzard wins but refuses countout over Danny Davis because Nelson Royal hit Davis with roll of quarters; Sika/Alan Martin d. D.I./Detroit Demolition when Martin hits D.I. with chain; Johnny Rich challenges Eddie Gilbert for $25,000 and puts Gilbert to sleep but ref Randy Anderson rules a DQ because Gilbert hit the ref; Tom Prichard d. Larry Davis; Tim Horner/Doug Furnas d. Nightmare Freddy/Ken Wayne by DQ when Paul E. Dangerously jumps Horner. ANGLES: Gilbert insults Riches' grandmother; MISSY'S MANOR: Shane Douglas reveals Lord Humongous as his long-lost cousin Yugo POWERSLAM-PLUS...could have been PILEDRIVER but ca missed Dangerously's run-in and lighting weat.

(WWC) - Mark & Chris Youngblood DDQ vs. Bobby Jaggers/Dan Kroffat; Rufus R. Jones d. Tony Falk; Hercules Ayala d. Carlos Colon for WWC title with wild melee at end. POWERSLAM-PLUS.

(MEMPHIS) - Phil Hickerson d. Ken Rapier; Brickhouse Brown d. Blue Knight; Robert Fuller/Jimmy Golden d. Alan Reynolds/Jack King; 8-man tag: Bill Dundee/Jeff Jarrett/Billy Travis/Shawn Baxter DQ over RPMs/Gary Young/Cactus Jack Foley when Jamie Dundee tries to grab Downtown Bruno and is attacked by Fuller. Arena match: B. Dundee/Jarrett vs. Fuller/Golden ends in brawl and Jamie is beaten silly. DRAW.

(SCW) - Scott Armstrong vs. Ken Timbs abruptly cut off; Moondog d. Chuck McCall; Mr. Wrestling II d. Red Shadow; Johnny & Tommy Rich d. Joey Maggs/Chic Donovan when Johnny uses object on Maggs. The Bullet introduced as Southern champion and Maggs/Ranger Ross as tag champs. Mat Classic: Jerry Blackwell DQ over Bruiser Brody. BOMB...Just a weak show.

(PWTW) - CWF: Johnny & Davey Rich DQ over Sika/Alan Martin; MEMPHIS: Brickhouse Brown DQ over Phil Hickerson; W. CLASS: SST wins World Class tag titles from Von Erichs; WWC: Hercules Ayala attacks Carlos & Nancy Colon at awards banquet; SCW: Tommy Rich turns on Scott Armstrong; FLAIR: Debbie Combs d. Heidi Lee Morgan. POWERSLAM...lots of action except for FLAIR.

(NWA) -TBS/A.M.: Sheepherders d. Curtis Thompson/J.C. Wilde. Brad Armstrong, Al PErez, Rick Steiner, Russian Assassins, Italian Stallion win other squashes. ANGLE: Steiner blows up because his fly, Spike, flies away. BOMB. TBS/P.M.: Kevin Sullivan d. Ron Simmons in dog collar match and wild melee ensues; Midnight Express announced as new World tag champs and the Road Warriors demand immediate title match. DRAW. NWA PRO: Ricky Morton, Tully & Arn, Ron Simmons, Sting, Midnight Express, Steve Williams win squashes. BOMB. WORLD WIDE: Armstrong/Simmons, Fantastics, Williams, Barry Windham win squashes. ANGLES: Steiner wins squash but gets into shoving match with Kevin Sullivan afterward; Uncle Ivan runs in on R.A. I with a chain and chokes before Paul Jones and R.A. II attack, but Morton comes in for save; STRAIGHT TALK: Magnum T.A. with Mike Rotundo. RESTHOLD. MAIN EVENT: From past syndicated shows---Midnights/Steiner d. Big Bear Collie/George South/Gary Royal; Armstrong d. Perez by DQ; and from Bash: Rotundo wins DQ over Williams in TV title match. RESTHOLD-PLUS.

(AWA) - Soldad Ustinov DQ'd for over-the-top; Wahoo McDaniel d. Wayne Bloom; Magnificent Mimi d. Lynn Lion; AWA TITLE: Jerry Lawler d. Tiejho Khan. Mat Classic: Nick Bockwinkel wins DQ over Blackjack Mulligan. BOMB PLUS.

(WWF) -SUPERSTARS: Anabolic Warrior, Ted DiBiase, Nino Bravo, George Steele, Ken Patera, Demolition win squashes. Blue (Owen Hart) Blazer d. Barry Horowitz. BOMB-PLUS. ANGLE: Jimmy Hart says he's giving Rougeau Brothers 50% each of the Hart Foundation's contract. Horowitz CHALLENGE: Powers of Pain d. Rusty Riddle/Gene Ligon and other squashes; PROFILE: Bad News Brown. RECAP: Jake Roberts tears the Cheryl Roberts tights from the behind of Rick Rude. BOMB-PLUS.

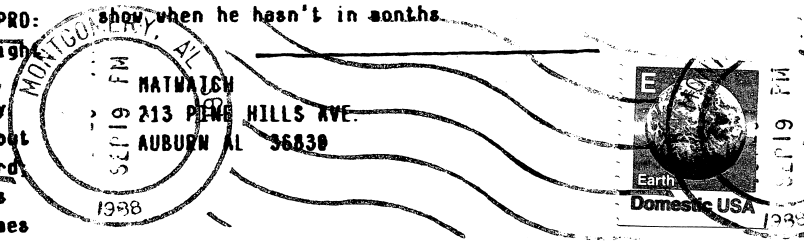
(W. CLASS) - Steve Simpson draw with J.J. Funk; Steve Cox wins DQ over Fatu when Buddy Roberts runs in; Iceman Parsons d. Matt Borne; Super Black Ninja d. Dan Fowler; Terry Gordy/Simpsons d. Jack Victory/John Tatum/Funk. DRAW-PLUS.

LINES OF THE WEEK - 1. Joe Pedicino, CWF, on Nelson Royal's interference: "I've never seen anybody take notes with a roll of quarters." 2. Tim Horner, CWF: "Anybody who knows The Lightning Express knows where you see one, you see the other. I'll just leave it at that." 3. Don Rickles, AWA: "I knew Verne when he pinned himself." 4. Sting, TBS: "Tony, do I have bad breath?" 5. Jesse Ventura, WWF: "McMahon, this Blue Blazer reminds me of me."

STRONGEST COMMENTS - 1. Eddie Gilbert, CWF, on Tommy Rich: "The man's a drunk, a has-been, he's an alcoholic, he can't wrestle, he never could!" 2. Rotunda, World Wide: "Rick Steiner is the goofiest guy I know." 3. Makhan Singh, Stampede: ED WHALEN: "What's the worst move in wrestling? SINGH: "Whoever made you play-by-play announcer."

CRYPTIC COMMENT - Williams, NWA Pro, for apologizing to the fans when the great bulk of viewers don't know of his recent personal travails.

BOO AWARD - SOUTHERN, for abruptly cutting off the Armstrong/Timbs match without a finish, and for continuing to use an opening stating Pedicino hosts the show when he hasn't in months.



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